The Fisherman's Son

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A fisherman’s son and in love with the sea,
he casts his nets far from shore.
Eyes blue as storms,
(inside he mourns)
never at peace, a lonely young man was he.

He owned a small house on a fair distant shore,
where porpoises slept
and wind played
through the door.

Nights he spent under the moon;
sleeping, at dawn he would put out to sea
and at noon
he would sail as far as he’d see.

Happy was he, or so thought the sea
who would rock him and soothe him to peace.
In her calm, loving arms his murmurs would cease.
"Be still," she said, "and know I love thee."

As clouds shifted and turned in the sky,
while a lone candle burned in his window above
the fisherman’s son would cry,
in the empty dark house, without love.

Dusky nights passing, he dragged in his boat,
far from the beauteous sea.
Salt in his eyes, and spray in his throat,
from his window, he watched her great mystery.

"How many nights must I spend so alone
up in this window, on this far shore?
So many nights under a moon of white bone,
with no porpoises and no wind in the door."
The sea, sad and confused,
teased his feet with her foam.
To cheer him, she beckoned, "Come play..."
With a shrug he refused,
and with regret and dismay
she said, "This is your home
far from me you can't roam.
Who else do you need but for me?
I love you, I feed you, I rock you to sleep
in my arms, in the deep,
and I whisper to you from the rocks on the shore.
What does it matter?
Cease all your chatter;
you need nothing but my waves at your door."
The fisherman's son turned with no word
his black hair and back to the sea.
"I have seen and have heard and believe thee," he sighed.
"And I say that I love thee," he said as he lied.

Surprised, the sea withdrew her tide;
and angry, her blue turned to black.
"Fisherman's son," she said in her storm,
"I will no longer be by thy side.
Leave this fair shore and seek what you lack,
but be warned.
Should you return to your door with a lover,
I'll take you from her; I'll take you for me,
for I am jealous of thee,
and will have you one way or the other."

The sea drew in her nets as the sun slowly fell,
and the moon flung his stars out to see.
And the fisherman's son, with his foot, crushed a shell,
and walked away from the sea.

When grey ribbons slipped over the waves,
and the last star had sunk into day
the fisherman's son took his boat from the caves,
and secured it land where it lay.
For several seasons
he traveled, searching for a love.
For several reasons,
he abandoned the sea and the shore.
For miles he had roved
until he returned, tired and grieving,
to find an open door.

She was a shadowed child
with quiet eyes that would rival the sea.
Hair of spun gold, hand timid and mild,
adrift and alone was she.
The fisherman's son, no longer alone,
took one frail hand and called her his own.
"Stay with me," his dark eyes spoke,
"in this house by the sea.
Be my wife and be faithful,
and I will love no other but thee."

She stayed with the man, in his house on a distant shore.
Far from her home, she longed not for more
than the stars, her beloved and the wind in the door.

"Fisherman's son, you have much to learn," spoke the sea.
"This much I know," he said, "I returned because I love thee."
"Your heart is not with me.
It rests down by the docks,
in your house on the shore,
in the white hands of one
with golden locks,
and eyes that would mimic the sea.
She would take you from me.
Beware; a temptress is she.
If her you not fear, then fear me."

The fishermen's son laughed as he cast out his nets,
"You have nothing to fear,
my heart is here, deep beneath your waves.
Truly my dear, I would love no one but thee."
The wind whispered beware;
but the sea murmured no more,
as he shrugged off this care,
and set sail to shore.

From her window above
salty tears spilled from her eyes.
She feared for her love,
her own prince of tides.
That day she spent weaving and crying,
by the window and sighing
awaiting his return.

As the pale moon arose,
he paced the shore
to the door
and without noise
crept up the stairs
and into the bed
where she slept.

Until dawn they made love
when at last she looked into his black eyes
and with trembles and sighs,
she whispered, "My love,
do not put thy boat out to sea,
for I fear that one night
in her wrath and her might
she would sweep you away and I would lose thee."

"Ah my dove," he smiled.
"You have nothing to fear
from her, the lady sea.
For I have tamed her you see."
His dark eyes cast upon her as lied,
"I love no one but thee."

And with a gentle kiss
he silenced her tears.
And with nothing amiss,
left her with her fears
to have his way with the sea.

For he felt he was true,
the fisherman's son was he,
no one would tame him,
he would sail and would love and be free.
"Surely, my sea, I love no one but thee.
My wife is dear
but she is there and not here.
I have loved thee since birth
with a gay heart and mirth,
but you cannot give me what she can.
And yet land
is no place for me.
I am home here at sea.
Truly I love her, but I also love thee."

"I do not share what I love," called the sea,
and she taunted him and his nets
were empty all day.
And at the end, when she tired, she called,
"Would you rather love her or love me?"

At home, while he sailed,
his wife watched and sometimes wailed,
"One with the ocean
one with the sea,
but never enough room
in his boat for me."

The fisherman's son, happy and free,
wove his nets by the sea.
His wife alone and afraid
watched the spot
where porpoises once played.
He'd take her out onto the shore
out of the house, out of the door,
to hold her against him,
as the red sun went out.
He'd whisper his love
so she'd hear above
the waves on the rocks on the shore.

The waves and the breakers
gently crashing sometimes lulled her to sleep.
It was no place for a young wife to be.
Staring out of her window,
at the rocks and she'd weep
as her lover set sail out to sea.

One tiny boat on a vast ocean wide,
one wave had only to laugh
one west wind to fail
to have a flood for a tide
and no wind in the sail.
Why did he leave his love's side?

Worse this than some sort of shivering storm
when the keel and bow start to shudder.
He would bail with the right hand
with the left resting firm on the rudder.

She sighed all of this
into his breast.
He calmed her and soothed her to rest.
"If I am not here in body
the waves will send you my spirit at best."

She sobbed in his hands
when she fell in his arms
her tears made him think carefully.
What would he gain if he never returned,
if he was one with the sea?
He paced on the shore for the days sure to come,
and his wife lightly slept in his bed;
dreaming his thoughts, she wept,
"Rather be loved than be dead."

The fisherman's son turned
to come back to his love,
but then he turned 'round once again,
the temptress the sea
laughed unmercifully,
"Would you rather love her than love me?"

The man took his boat out
for one last dusky sail.
The sea was calm as the temptress could be,
but the moon was becoming quite pale.

His lover awoke from a sleep
she was doomed to repeat;
but she walked to the window once more.
Looking out at the waves and the
pale moonlit night,
she saw nothing but dark sea and bright shore.

Her eyes searched the darkness
that had once been a sunset.
They sought a small boat on the sea.
She looked back for the last time, and softly she said,
"He would rather love her than love me."

Susannah Wood, WC '97